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BEFORE THE  
HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE  
TERRORISM, UNCONVENTIONAL THREATS AND CAPABILITIES  
SUBCOMMITTEE

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Thank you for the opportunity to address you this afternoon on the subject of how we can overcome interagency problems in developing and implementing a national strategy for the Global War on Terrorism. In the time I have I would like to discuss the nature of the war that we face, the strategy we need to adopt to win that war, as well as the type of interagency cooperation that is required for that strategy to succeed. I will conclude with several recommendations.

### **UNDERSTANDING THE NATURE OF THIS WAR**

More than four years have passed since the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, more than six since Usama bin Ladin declared war on the United States, and more than a decade since Al Qaeda first attacked U.S. citizens. Yet discussions of U.S. strategy in the so-called Global War on Terrorism too often remain vague, cloaked in euphemism. Such an approach prevents the type of clear-headed assessment that must form the bedrock of rational strategy.

As Carl von Clausewitz argued, “The first, the supreme, the most far-reaching act of judgment that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish ... the kind of war on which they are embarking, neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature. This is the first of all strategic questions and the most comprehensive.”<sup>1</sup> This is no simple task. As Clausewitz notes, too often leaders either misunderstand the nature of the conflict or try to fight the war as they wish it were. In either case, the results can be disastrous.

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<sup>1</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 88.

Senior leaders have termed the current war the “Global War on Terrorism” and the “Struggle Against Violent Extremism”. In fact, what we face can best be described as a protracted global insurgency. Each of these words helps describe the nature of the war. Moreover, each helps point the way to the strategy we need to pursue in order to prevail.

First, this war is global in its scope. Like communism and fascism before it, Al Qaeda’s extremist ideology has international appeal. It is able to draw adherents not only from Islamic societies, but also from disaffected groups in Western societies. Indeed, extremists use the fruits of globalization, such as rapid and cheap access to information and transportation, to recruit and train new members as well as to plan and launch terrorist attacks.

Although the war is global in scope, it is also being fought at the regional and national levels. Islamic extremist groups have a presence in many areas. Their activity, however, is most pronounced in three: Central Asia (centered on Afghanistan and Pakistan), Southwest Asia (centered on Iraq), and Southeast Asia (centered on Indonesia). The July 2005 London bombings are evidence that Europe may be an active theater as well. In the future, other areas, such as North and Sub-Saharan Africa, could also become active.

Extremist groups also pursue local agendas. In particular, they seek the overthrow of moderate regimes throughout the Islamic world.

Second, this war is an insurgency within the Islamic world.<sup>2</sup> It is both a battle over legitimacy as well as a series of more traditional insurgencies between individual extremist groups and moderate regimes in the Islamic world.

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<sup>2</sup> Michael E. Vlahos, *Terror’s Mask: Insurgency Within Islam* (Laurel, MD: Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory 2002).

Third, this is a protracted war or, as the Defense Department has begun to call it, a “long war”, one that will last decades rather than years. In some respects, it resembles previous protracted conflicts, like the Peloponnesian War, the Punic wars, and the Cold War. Like past conflicts, coalitions and national resolve will play an important role in determining success or failure. Also like past conflicts, this war will not be decided by a single battle or campaign.

Unlike past wars, however, this conflict is highly asymmetric. The Peloponnesian War was waged by coalitions of Greek city-states, while the Cold War occurred between two superpowers and their allies. Whatever their differences – and they were significant – the belligerents in past protracted wars had much more in common than our current adversaries and we do.

The nature of this war has several implications for the strategy we need to pursue. First, because this is a global war, fought internationally, regionally, and locally, so too must we develop the capacity to plan and operate at each level. Our adversaries do not recognize state sovereignty, nor do they respect international boundaries. Rather, they exploit our respect of these norms for their own purposes. Our strategy must be geared to denying extremist groups the sanctuary and the freedom of action they need to operate. It must also provide the ways and means to drain the swamps in which the extremists’ virulent ideology breeds.

Second, because this war is an insurgency, our national strategy must harness all the tools of national power. The use of force by the U.S. military has, and will continue to have, a role to play, to be sure. But more important over the long term will efforts to build up local forces to deal with extremist groups on their own territory. And military

efforts to kill or capture terrorists are likely to be subordinate to political measures to ensure participation in government and economic programs to spur development.

Third, because this is a protracted war, our strategy must be sustainable. This war will span the terms of many presidents of both political parties. It will not be won by the Republican Party or the Democratic Party. It will be won, if it is to be won, by the full resources of the United States, working closely with and through our friends and allies. It is thus imperative that we craft a sustainable, bipartisan strategy for waging this war.

Finally, this strategy must also be sustainable in terms of public support. It must, in other words, allow the United States the ability to achieve its aims at an economic and human cost that will be acceptable to most Americans over the long run.

#### **ELEMENTS OF A STRATEGY**

What should such a strategy look like? First, it requires that we work with and through partners in perhaps 60-70 countries simultaneously to combat extremists at the global, regional, and local levels.

Second, it must integrate all instruments of national power. In some cases, the role of the military will be to take the lead. More often however, the role of the military will be to hold the line against extremists, to buy other agencies the time to restructure the environment so that it is much less hospitable to extremism.

Third, it requires the ability to advise and support local forces in partner nations. The United States needs to work with its friends and allies to help them counter extremism on their own soil. It also requires the ability to conduct unconventional warfare in areas that are either ungoverned or hostile to the United States.

U.S. forces should be small and maintain a low profile. These units should be stationed abroad for periods of years rather than months. They must develop deep knowledge of the countries and societies. They should work with local forces, not supplant them. We would do well to heed T.E. Lawrence's injunction not to "try to do too much with your own hands. Better the Arabs do it tolerably than that you do it perfectly. It is their war, and you are there to help them, not win it for them."<sup>3</sup>

I believe that the *National Military Strategic Plan for the War on Terrorism* and particularly the 2006 *Quadrennial Defense Review Report* point the Defense Department in the right direction. However, in the end both documents are limited because they are Defense Department documents. It is, after all, the *National Military Strategic Plan for the War on Terrorism*, not the National Plan. The *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism* was released in February 2003 and badly needs updating.

## **THE INTERAGENCY CONTEXT**

The key relationship in waging this war, both in Washington, D.C. and across the globe, is that between the Department of Defense, the Department of State, and the Intelligence Community – primarily the National Clandestine Service. Each agency is governed by its own set of legal authorities – Titles 10, 22, and 50, respectively – that outline what it can (and cannot) do. Each also has its own organizational philosophy and culture.

None of these organizations is currently optimized to wage this war at the local, regional, and international levels. One problem has to do with the way they are

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<sup>3</sup> T.E. Lawrence, "Twenty-Seven Articles," *The Arab Bulletin*, August 20, 1917, reproduced at <http://www.lib.byu.edu/~rdh/wwi/1917/27arts.html> (accessed March 12, 2006).

organized. The Defense Department is organized at the local, regional, and global levels. At the local level, the Defense Department has established task forces for waging the GWOT in a number of countries. These include not only Iraq and Afghanistan, but also the Joint Special Operations Task Force (JSOTF) in the Philippines. At the regional level, the Defense Department plans and conducts operations through the regional combatant commanders. At the global level, U.S. Special Operations Command has been given the mission of planning and conducting counter-terrorist operations. The Office of the Secretary of Defense and Joint Staff also plan and operate at the global level.

The State Department and intelligence agencies, by contrast, are organized primarily at the local level, through individual missions or stations in the field, and at the global level through their headquarters in Washington, D.C. These important organizations thus lack the ability to plan and operate at the regional level. Moreover, whereas the U.S. military is comfortable operating as part of a coalition, other government agencies are much more comfortable working bilaterally.

Efforts to fight Islamic extremism in the Horn of Africa illustrate these asymmetries. Several years ago, the Defense Department stood up Combined Joint Task Force - Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA) with the mission of helping local states eliminate terrorist groups and provide a stable secure environment that is inhospitable to terrorist groups. Within its area of operation, however, are not only states with which we enjoy good relations, such as Kenya, but also states with which we do *not* enjoy good relations, such as Sudan, as well as areas that are essentially ungoverned, such as Somalia. It is one thing to form a regional military structure; it is quite another to develop a regional counter-terrorism or counter-insurgency organization.

A second asymmetry has to do with training and education. The U.S. military has a culture that values training and education. For Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps officers, attendance at professional military education (PME) institutions is an important criterion for command and promotion. Through a professional education, officers learn how to think strategically as well as how to plan and conduct operations.

By contrast, the State Department and intelligence community do not emphasize professional education beyond the entry level. They do not have an institutionalized system of education throughout an officer's career, nor do they link education to promotion. Their culture prizes implementing over planning.

#### **WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE?**

To be successful over the long term, we need unity of effort both in Washington, D.C. and in the field.

Unity of effort in Washington, D.C. requires the establishment of a truly national strategy for waging the Global War on Terrorism. It requires leadership at the White House to craft and oversee the execution of such a strategy. And it requires the ability to hold agencies accountable for their actions.

Developing national strategy is difficult; it is not impossible. National Security Decision Directive 75, which governed relations with the Soviet Union in the final years of the Cold War, is a prime example of how an administration can integrate the political, military, economic, and ideological instruments of power to achieve U.S. objectives.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> National Security Decision Directive 75, "U.S. Relations with the USSR," January 17, 1983, at <http://fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsdd-075.htm> (accessed October 15, 2004), 2

We also need unity of effort in the field, in the form of a unified country team backed by a capable interagency regional counter-terrorism structure.

The experience of combating insurgency in Central America during the 1980s demonstrates the importance of a unified approach. Key to the U.S. effort to defeat communist revolutionaries in El Salvador was an interagency strategy implemented by a unified country team under the leadership of Ambassador Dean Hinton. The strategy involved assisting and reforming the Salvadoran armed forces, promoting electoral reforms, and seeking political reconciliation. It also required close cooperation between the country team in El Salvador and those in neighboring states, and it was a strategy in which the government in San Salvador was a full partner.

To make a unified effort a reality today, each of the major players will need to implement changes to their culture and organization. Some transcend organizational boundaries. For example, the U.S. government needs to get over its fetish with force protection. Soldiers, spies, and diplomats who are hunkered down in an enclave in a capital are next to useless in waging counterinsurgency. To be useful, they must have both the freedom and the desire to mingle freely with the local population. Too often, rules of engagement, backed by organizational culture and individual proclivities, prevent that. This needs to change.

In a number of cases, other government agencies would do well to learn from the Defense Department. To be successful in the current war, for example, the State Department will need to expand significantly the ranks of the Foreign Service and adopt an expeditionary mindset. Both the State Department and intelligence agencies would also be well advised to expand significantly their professional education programs. Their

officers need more educational opportunities, both at PME institutions and top civilian graduate schools. The goal should be to build an interagency cadre of experts who can plan and conduct counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism operations. Such a program should draw upon the best and the brightest from these agencies and reward them with promotion upon successful completion of their studies.

In other cases, the Defense Department would do well to emulate other government agencies, such as by devoting greater attention to language and cultural training. The Defense Department does a good job of teaching adults foreign languages at the Defense Language Institute. However, as anyone who has learned a foreign language knows, the earlier one begins, the easier it is. The Defense Department would thus do well to require four years of a foreign language for cadets attending the military academies and recipients of Reserve Officer Training Corps scholarships. The services should reward language proficiency with substantial bonuses, much as they do other important combat qualifications.

Greater cultural awareness is another imperative. Prospective and serving officers need greatly expanded opportunities to live and study abroad. The military needs an expanded cadre of regional experts. More broadly, it needs an officer corps that feels comfortable living and working with and within other cultures. The services should thus greatly expand the opportunities available to cadets and officers to live and study abroad.

The Defense Department should also devise ways to tap more effectively into the rich diversity of American society. The United States has among its citizens natives of every nation on earth, people who can speak more eloquently about the virtues of democratic government than any Washington bureaucrat or Madison Avenue advertising

executive. Similarly, we have citizens who claim nearly every language in existence as their native tongue. To the extent the United States has under-performed as a nation, it has been in mobilizing these resources.

Finally, to be successful, the Defense Department will need to re-balance Special Operations Forces. Since the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, SOF have been at the forefront of launching Direct Action (DA) strikes against terrorists across the globe. At this, they have done an outstanding job. Over the long term, however, their greatest value is likely to lie in their ability to work with and through foreign partners. As a result, their skills in Foreign Internal Defense (FID) and Unconventional Warfare (UW) are likely to be at a premium.

SOF – and Army Special Forces (SF) in particular – are the only component of the U.S. military where members are assessed and selected based on their ability to work with and through foreign forces. In that vein, reports that DA is squeezing out SF's traditional focus on UW and FID are worrisome. The capability of U.S. SOF to conduct UW and FID needs to be preserved and enhanced.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, the heavy use of SOF in Iraq and Afghanistan has disrupted the traditional regional orientation of SOF commands. As soon as practical, that orientation should be re-established.

In conclusion, we have a long way to go to adapt our institutions to the war we face. I take solace, however, in our national history, which contains tale after tale of adapting to challenges. It is a tough job, but, as I have endeavored to show, it is one we have faced before. The institutions of the government are beginning to adapt; what is needed is the tenacious leadership to see the messy process of change through.

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<sup>5</sup> Sean Naylor, "More Than Door-Kickers: Special Ops Forces are Misused as Man-Hunters, Critics Say," *Armed Forces Journal International* (March 2006).

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Thomas G. Mahnken is a Visiting Fellow at the Philip Merrill Center for Strategic Studies at The Johns Hopkins University's Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS). During the 2003-04 academic year he served as the Acting Director of the SAIS Strategic Studies Program. He is currently on leave of absence from the U.S. Naval War College, where he is a Professor in the Department of Strategy and Policy. His areas of primary expertise are strategy, intelligence, and special operations forces.

Prof. Mahnken has held positions in both the government and the private sector. He served on the staff of the Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction. He served in the Defense Department's Office of Net Assessment, where he conducted research into the emerging revolution in military affairs. He also served as a member of the Gulf War Air Power Survey, commissioned by the Secretary of the Air Force to examine the performance of U.S. forces during the war with Iraq. Prior to that, he served as an analyst in the Non-Proliferation Directorate of the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), where he was responsible for enforcing U.S. missile proliferation policy.

Prof. Mahnken is the author of *Uncovering Ways of War: U.S. Intelligence and Foreign Military Innovation, 1918-1941* (Cornell University Press, 2002) and (with James R. FitzSimonds) of *The Limits of Transformation: Officer Attitudes toward the Revolution in Military Affairs* (Naval War College Press, 2003). He is editor (with Emily O. Goldman) of *The Information Revolution in Military Affairs in Asia* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2004) and (with Richard K. Betts) of *Paradoxes of Strategic Intelligence: Essays in Honor of Michael I. Handel* (Frank Cass, 2003). He is also the co-editor of the *Journal of Strategic Studies*. His article, "A Corps for Tomorrow" was the Marine Corps Association's Major General Richard C. Schulze Memorial Essay for 2000. He also won first honorable mention in the fourth annual Colin L. Powell Joint Warfighting Essay Contest and first prize in the National Defense University's first annual Revolution in Military Affairs essay contest. His other articles have appeared in *International Security*, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, *Intelligence and National Security*, *Joint Force Quarterly*, *The Washington Quarterly*, *Orbis*, *Comparative Strategy*, *Strategic Review*, *National Security Studies Quarterly*, the United Nations journal *Disarmament*, as well as several edited volumes. He has written opinion pieces for *The Washington Post*, the *Baltimore Sun*, and other newspapers. He has appeared on Fox News, CNN, BBC, and CBC, among other networks.

Prof. Mahnken earned his master's degree and doctorate in international affairs from SAIS and was a National Security Fellow at the John M. Olin Institute for Strategic Studies at Harvard University. He was a *summa cum laude* graduate of the University of Southern California with bachelor's degrees in history and international relations (with highest honors) and a certificate in defense and strategic studies.